

Examining Offender Reentry in the Kansas City Metropolitan Area:

A Gaps Analysis

Submitted to: The Kansas City Metropolitan Crime Commission and the Kansas City Health Foundation

By

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## Introduction

As a result of President Nixon's "War on Crime" in the 1970s which evolved into President Reagan's "War on Drugs" in the 1980s, America's criminal justice policy underwent many changes. In response to increases in rates of some types of crime (both perceived and actual), as well as increases in the proliferation of 'crack-style' cocaine, sentencing strategies at both the Federal and State levels changed dramatically. In essence, American criminal justice policy adopted a 'get tough' theme that continued throughout the 1990s. 'Get tough' policies motivated many states to move from an indeterminate to a determinate sentencing model which increased the likelihood a felon would end up in prison, while also lengthening the amount of time an individual spent in prison for some crimes (most notably violent crime as well as drug-related crime). Further, "Three strikes and you're out" legislation was adopted by a majority of the United States. Initially "Three strikes" legislation was geared toward allowing a life-long prison sentence for a third violent felony, however, many states relaxed the requirements that the felonies be of a violent nature, thereby making a larger portion of the offender population eligible for life-long sentences (although in many instances "life" was actually expressed as a mandatory 25-year sentence).

As a result of the 'get tough' movement in criminal justice, prison populations increased exponentially since the 1970s. In 2009, the Pew Center on the States released a series of reports revealing some startling statistics. Specifically, America's correctional population (i.e., those who are under some form of supervision and/or correctional control) topped 7.3 million. This aggregate number translates into the following: more than 1 in 100 adults are in an American jail or prison (an unprecedented figure – 25 years ago the rate was 1 in 177); 1 in 31 adults are in an American jail, prison, or under probationary or parole supervision (also unprecedented). These rates of correctional control are not distributed evenly across the general population, however. For example, 1 out of 11 African

American adults are under correctional control (prison, jail, or community supervision), while the rates are 1 out of 29, and 1 out of 45 for Hispanic and White adults, respectively. Further, 1 out of 18 adult men, and 1 out of 89 adult women are under some form of correctional control. In fact, the correctional system, as a whole, has become so large, some have argued that America has now developed an Industrial Prison Complex, similar to what President Eisenhower warned against at the beginning of the Cold War with his Military Industrial Complex thesis. That is, America now has a system that builds upon itself, and grows at barely controllable rates, requiring a disproportionate amount of resources (Schlosser, 1998). Indeed the aforementioned Pew Report on the States series also revealed that many states' spending on corrections equals and in some cases exceeds that which is being spent on education.

Incidentally the average cost of incarcerating an individual in a United States prison amounts to \$29,000 per year. With the extent to which mandatory minimum sentencing has been applied, this annual cost is likely to increase (and has increased) as the incarcerated population ages requiring increased medical attention as well as other special accommodations (e.g., prison facilities that are handicapped-accessible). Raw cost is just one way in which the public pays for a large population of incarcerated felons. When an individual is incarcerated, the impacts reverberate, immediately for the family of the inmate, as well as the community from which they came. In fact, the geographic distribution of returning inmates is also concentrated in certain areas and not distributed evenly across cities. One block-area in Detroit for example has 1 in 7 adult under some form of correctional control. In early 2009 the Kansas City Star ran a series of stories regarding an area of town the newspaper dubbed to be a "Murder Factory" – with a large number of violent felons residing in an area that comprised only three zip codes. The neighborhoods felons leave when they are incarcerated are

disorganized to begin with, and often these felons return to neighborhoods that are in even worse shape.

Despite the fact that changes in sentencing statutes have made prison sentences more likely to be assigned by judges, and increased the length of time people spend in prison, nearly everyone who enters prison comes back at some point. In other words, each year, prisons admit and release about the same number of people (Petersilia, 2000). Of course, there is a very small fraction of the prison population that is serving a true life sentence without the possibility of parole, as well as an even smaller fraction that is serving time on death row and will be executed. Outside of these two small fractions however, all other prison inmates (and jail inmates) will return to their communities.

As a result of the realization that most prison inmates return to the community, “Offender Reentry” has become a critical concern amongst correctional administrators, and legislative bodies. In 2000 Jeremy Travis, director of the National Institute of Justice at the time, issued an executive report titled “But They All Come Back: Rethinking Prisoner Reentry”. Travis’ report was alarming in that (at the time) America was seeing the “back end” so to speak, of the incarceration binge. In other words, the (growing) wave of offenders that had been sent to prison – many of whom who had been sentenced for a long period of time – were now leaving prisons, having served their time. Further, many of them were returning to the community without any parole supervision (more than 20%). In 2000 over half a million offenders reentered the community from an American prison. In 2009, the number of reentering offenders topped 650,000 (U.S. Department of Justice; Office of Justice Programs, 2009).

The large and increasing number of offenders reentering the community has great impacts on the neighborhoods and economies to which they return. On an individual level, the issues a reentering offender faces are numerous and complex. The public and elected officials often make the mistake of

thinking that merely spending time in prison – an extended ‘time out’, so to speak – in and of itself holds rehabilitative potential. This belief is extended by the notion that no rational person would want to return to prison, having experienced punishment for a wrongdoing. In fact however, many offenders who leave prison do indeed return – in very high numbers. Some have estimated that greater than 50 percent of those released from prison will return within 1 year; an additional 24 percent within two years, and an additional 12 percent within 3 years. It was noted above that the average cost of prison incarceration was \$29,000 annually. The average annual cost of community supervision however is \$1,250 to \$2,750 for probation and parole supervision, respectively. Clearly there is a great economic benefit to keeping an individual out of prison – particularly at a time when State and Federal revenue is down and budgets are in crisis.

The current study endeavors to investigate offender reentry. While many agencies and individuals work very hard every day to insure the success of offenders who leave facilities and return to the community, there are likely ways in which these systems of reentry and assistance can be improved. As such, the current study examines will investigate offender reentry in the Kansas City Metropolitan area via a series of focus groups designed to shed light on current practices, and moreover, identify ‘gaps’ – or areas in need of improvement that might serve to increase the likelihood that an offender will succeed when they return to the metropolitan area. Specifically, the following research question will be investigated: “In what ways, via policy, practice, or otherwise, should the current system of offender reentry be changed in order to enhance the likelihood an offender will ‘succeed’ in the community, and avoid future incarceration?”

### A Closer Look at the Kansas City Metropolitan Area

It is important to understand how many people in the Kansas City Metropolitan area are specifically involved in the criminal justice systems. The state and federal system's numbers are the only ones considered for this particular table, however, it is important to bear in mind that county and municipal facilities in our area represent hundreds of additional returning offenders every year. Approximately 3,000 to 4,000 offenders will leave state and federal facilities each year and return to this metro area for services. The table below reveals the number of people on state and federal probation, per county, and the total number of offenders on supervision in these counties.

<b>County</b>	<b>Probation/ Community Corrections</b>	<b>Parole</b>	<b>Total</b>
Jackson	5,194	2,777	7,971
Clay/ Platte	1,135	519	1,654
Cass (includes some Jackson Co)	1,064	306	1,370
Wyandotte	796	859	1,655
Johnson	571	692	1,263
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,760</b>	<b>5,153</b>	<b>13,913</b>

The average system costs are also important. When reviewing this data it is important to understand that costs per person tend to decrease when the number of offenders housed at the facility increases. Facilities in our area range drastically in terms of size and cost. Below is a sample of costs per offender per day and per year:

<b>Facility</b>	<b>Cost Per Day</b>	<b>Per Year</b>
Jackson CO/ KCMO Detention Facility	\$59.16	\$21,593.40
Johnson Co. Corrections a "regular" bed is	\$104.00	\$37,960.00
Johnson Co. mental health related services	\$178.00	\$64,970.00
Kansas Department of Corrections	\$68.84	\$25,127.00
Missouri Division of Adult Institutions	\$45.09	\$16,457.85
United States Bureau of Prisons	\$70.95	\$25,896.75
National Average Cost of Jail/ Prison	\$79.45	\$29,000.00

Diversion programs are growing increasingly popular and providing people with opportunities to remain on supervision in the community can not only be more successful but also can save a great deal of money. The costs below represent the cost of parole, probation or "community corrections," aka probation within the community, per individual per day and per year.

<b>Entity</b>	<b>Cost per Day</b>	<b>Cost per Year</b>
Missouri Probation and Parole	\$3.17	\$1,157.05
Kansas Community Corrections	\$5.74	\$2,095.00
United States Parole Supervision	\$10.26	\$3,744.90

## **Methodology**

The current study – a Gaps Analysis – utilized focus groups in order to investigate the aforementioned research question. These focus groups were comprised of professionals who work for agencies that work with and serve the offender population – both line staff (e.g, probation and parole officers, correctional counselors, case managers), as well as administrators. Focus groups of police officers were utilized as well. Focus groups of professionals were assembled from both the state of Kansas and Missouri, since the Kansas City metropolitan area spans across the state line, and included Federal, State and Municipal agencies. Agencies that serve both a supervisory function for offenders (e.g., probation and parole agencies) as well as agencies that deliver treatment services (e.g., employment services, substance use treatment services) were utilized. In addition, focus groups of offenders – both those who are currently incarcerated as well as those who had been incarcerated and are now in the community – were utilized. Attempts were made to gain both the perspective of professionals, as well as offenders, regarding offender reentry and the barriers to the success, as well as things that enhanced the likelihood of success.

A total of 25 focus groups were conducted, each lasting a minimum of 90 minutes, with some exceeding two hours. The size of the focus groups varied – the smallest involved just three participants with the largest having 11 participants. The focus group discussions were led by the principal investigators (Lora McDonald and Alex Holsinger). The subject matter to be discussed was introduced by the focus group facilitators, however, after stating the overall purpose of the focus group discussions (i.e., to discuss the experiences of the reentering offender), focus group participants were free to bring up any other sub-topic they chose in order to shed light on the aforementioned research question. Every effort was made to encourage active participation from all focus group members in order to gain as much information as possible. Focus group participants were informed at every step (from initial



recruitment contact – usually via telephone and/or email) that participation was completely voluntary and they may choose at any time to not participate at all, or, cease participation at any time during the focus group. Further, all focus group participants were informed that the principal investigators would be taking notes throughout the discussions, however, no other recording devices (e.g., audio and/or video equipment) would be used. In addition, focus group participants were informed that no identifying information would be utilized in the report, and in fact it was not necessary to share any identifying information for the purpose of the research. The principal investigators did however share their own identifying and contact information with all focus group participants in order to allow future contact should the participants think of additional information that they wanted to share. The current research was proposed to, and approved by, the University of Missouri – Kansas City’s Social Science Institutional Review Board per Federal research guidelines. As such, the current research meets the criteria for the protection of human subjects involved in primary research.

As anticipated, a great deal of valuable information was gleaned from the focus groups. Information was recorded via note-taking by the principal investigators during each of the focus groups. The hand-written notes were then transcribed to facilitate the identification of themes regarding offender reentry. The nature of the current research is qualitative, as opposed to quantitative. That is, the information is of a qualitative nature, and as such, no attempts will be made to quantify the results for the purpose of inferential statistical testing or the generalization to other locales besides the Kansas City metropolitan area. The information recorded was analyzed in order to identify prevalent themes – meaning themes that were identified by the preponderance of the evidence. However, specific numbers of responses were not counted (i.e., it will not be stated that “X” number of respondents stated “Y”). Rather, the weight of the statements made was considered, when determining what the prevalent themes regarding correctional issues and offender reentry, and presented accordingly.

While it is likely that the issues identified via the current research and the policy recommendations that may be made in response have applicability to other geographical locations, the current research is location-specific. In other words, the current research applies to the Kansas City metropolitan area only, and as such recommendations are meant for the immediate local community. The results will be presented according to the major themes that were identified. Specifically, “Policy issues”, “System practices”, and “Public education/awareness” will provide the framework for the presentation of what was learned. In addition, recommendations will be made as the results are presented.

## **Results**

### ***What’s Working***

In this study, the investigators did not attempt to glean information about what was working well within the systems. However, many participants shared information about their own systems, non-for-profits delivering high quality services, and practices that are showing effectiveness or promise of success with the offender population. It is important to share some of the highlights of this reentry work in metropolitan Kansas City to demonstrate what is possible in other systems in this community.

***Systematic Focus on Reentry through Area Departments of Corrections:*** All of the area systems that participated in this study have taken a serious look at reentry processes and practices over the past decade. Most of these area systems have come together with social service providers and the broad community to increase success for former prisoners, make the community safer, and prevent future crime and recidivism. Kansas, Missouri, area counties and federal systems have all improved their processes of reentry preparation, staff training, and community response.

**Reentry Programs Targeting Risk Levels:** In this metropolitan area, Kansas has made great strides to incorporate “evidence based practices” throughout the Department of Corrections. This evidence encourages systems to target those who are most likely to commit new crimes or return to prison following their release. They use effective instruments to predict who is appropriate for intensive services and implement programming for this population. Though this practice is relatively new, Kansas is beginning to see results from this strategy.

**More Evidence Based Assessment Tools and Programs:** Both public systems and private resources have been paying attention to evidence about effective reentry processes around the world. Kansas employs the LSIR, an assessment instrument, to determine the appropriate level of intervention. Missouri has developed a similar tool, the FRRRI, which they began using in 2009. The tools are used to determine the level of supervision and to make referrals to appropriate services. Likewise, programs in the community are being modeled after effective “evidence based strategies”.

**Faith Based and Community Organizations Response:** Community non-for-profits have been working in the world of reentry for decades, even before it was even referred to as “reentry” and these area leaders can be looked to for their expertise in the field. In the course of this research, there will be suggestions for improvements on programming yet the reader should be careful not to interpret this as criticism of the existing programs. Rather, input from these programs was a major contribution to this research. These experts in reentry have seen what works and what doesn’t. While there are still many gaps in reentry services, without these programs, the community could be in great crisis. The Kansas City metropolitan area is rich with resources eager to provide input not only to the broad corrections community but to their own programming, seeking change that will benefit the client population and the community as a whole.

***Specialized Caseloads and Targeted Courts for Specific Populations:*** Most of the area systems have some specialized caseloads. Examples include sex offenders and those with mental health or dual diagnosis. Missouri has a “youthful violent offender” caseload. The officers in these positions specialize in the supervision of the classification of offenders and often complement their supervision with case management and other programs. People who manage case loads of people with mental health diagnosis, for example, get to know details about what resources serve the population, how to get an authorized payee, or what indicators may be for a potential relapse. Having experts in each area is an effective approach recognized by most of the area systems.

Likewise, targeted courts become familiar with the needs of their population. One of the best examples is the Drug Court in Jackson County, which has been a benchmark model in our nation. Other current examples include Missouri Reintegration Court, Federal Reentry Court, and Mental Health Court. In Jackson County, there is Fathering Court for those who fail to pay child support. These systems are designed to prevent further incarceration, create wrap around services, and identify risk levels or indicators before a person reaches the point of further incarceration.

***Mentoring Programs*** have such noteworthy success that the first and second round of Second Chance Act Funding to faith based and community organizations allowed only for mentoring based projects. Typically one on one or small group mentoring matches are made; some are peers who are successful former offenders, others based around employment, but most are just a concerned community volunteer who helps the individual navigate through resources, job interviews, and general reintegration. As one focus group noted, the benefits are compounded because when the mentor sees firsthand the barriers the returning offender faces, they become an advocate for employment and other opportunities through the broad community. Several of the community organizations who participated in this research do mentoring projects.

**Cognitive and Behavioral Programs** were discussed through multiple groups. Both Kansas and Missouri have standardized curriculums for their respective systems. Offenders and corrections staff could specify changes they had seen in themselves and participants of the cognitive programs.

**Work Opportunity Tax Credits and Federal Bonding** WOTC has been available for certain populations who find securing employment difficult and offenders are eligible for these benefits if hired within six months of their return from incarceration. The tax credit is \$2,400 per hire and bonds are in the amount of \$5,000 (up to three bonds in MO). This incentive is helpful for offenders who are marketing themselves and for programs that try to encourage employers to hire ex-offenders. Both Missouri and Kansas have specialists who help the employer complete the paperwork to file for these benefits.

**Offender Workforce Development Specialists** are trained under a graduate level curriculum to address everything from career development to job retention. The OWDS curriculum was developed by National Institute of Corrections and those who complete the course can earn up to 6 hours of graduate or undergrad credit. Kansas and Missouri Departments of Corrections have trained their own staff, private reentry providers and other corrections systems employees in this curriculum. MO and KS did the first bi-state class in the nation. Graduates of this class report feeling more equipped to help and offender find a job and keep a job over time. More training is being planned in the metro to begin summer 2010.

**Linkages Between Parole and Prison** The Kansas Reentry Program has been successful in creating a bridge from prison and community; Parole officers now go inside prisons to meet returning offenders prior to their release. This was mentioned in multiple focus groups as it eases the apprehension of the offender and helps the officer better understand the prison environment.

## ***What's Missing***

### ***Employment- Program and Service Gaps***

Employment for reentering offenders (and all offenders for that matter) proved to be one of if not the most prevalent issue discussed during the focus groups. Both professionals and offenders identified the need for employment (or lack thereof) as being the most substantial issue regarding offender success in the community. However it was revealed by a vast majority of the focus groups that there are two issues related to employment; (1) finding a job, and (2) retaining a job.

**Finding a job:** Both offenders and professionals cited the stigma associated with having a prior felony conviction (and/or prior incarceration) as being a substantial barrier to finding a job. Several focus groups also indicated that there appeared to be a lack of sustainable jobs – that is, jobs, that if obtained, offering a wage that would allow an offender to meet their financial obligations. Regardless, the fact remains that many employers disregard ex-felons as suitable candidates particularly when the offender is forthcoming on their application and/or interview materials. When asked to discuss ways in which ex-inmates can better secure employment, several focus groups cited many options, mainly centering on the need for information, and the education of potential employers.

While some businesses are known to have a tradition of offering employment to ex-offenders, these businesses need to be better-identified and better-known, particularly amongst the agencies that serve and supervise the offender population. It's not adequate to merely 'get the word out' however. Many probation and parole officers noted the need to compile information about agencies that hire ex-offenders, and a need to keep that information current – for example, an index or a 'clearinghouse' of business that have shown a propensity to offer a chance of employment for ex-offenders (incidentally,

the 'need for richer and current information' about a number of areas concerning offender reentry was a near-constant theme through a majority of the focus groups).

A need for educating business owners about the offender population was also cited as a need, that if met could facilitate the obtaining of employment. In other words, business owners need to be proactively educated about the great need for employment opportunity within the offender population, but in a way that minimizes risk. Clearly business owners are reluctant to provide an initial opportunity for an individual who has a well-documented track record of offending behavior. However, if business owners were more aware of the resources that they could utilize should they hire an ex-offender – for example, knowing that many ex-offenders have probation or parole officers that can be called in the event of an issue – perhaps they would be more likely to hire. In addition business owners could be educated regarding the fact that offering a job to an ex-offender greatly decreases the likelihood that that person will re-offend, making their community, and in turn their business, safer.

**Keeping a job:** The focus group discussions revealed very clearly that there is a distinct difference between *finding* a job, and *keeping* a job. While some ex-offenders (perhaps a minority) are quite good at finding at least minimal employment (e.g., in the fast-food service industry), an even smaller minority are equipped with the skills to maintain that employment and treat the opportunity responsibly and in a way that will increase the likelihood that they will not be fired shortly after being hired. Indeed both professional and offender focus group discussions revealed many “hirings” and just about as many “firings” amongst the offender population.

The same criminogenic (i.e., crime-producing) needs and cognitive processes that are at work when motivating criminal behavior, are the same factors that contribute to the likelihood that even a good job opportunity will be short-lived. In other words, a goodly proportion of the offender population

do not have the relational skills, the temperament, the work ethic, and/or the maturity to successfully negotiate a work environment.

As a result of the aforementioned negative factors, many focus groups revealed the need for more *transitional employment services*. These transitional employment services could come in a variety of different forms, but all would strive toward the same goal: the successful maintenance of an employment opportunity. For example, the use of an agency that provided 'job coaching' would allow for a buffer between an employer, and an employed ex-offender. The 'job coach' would work with the offender on a regular basis, discussing issues related to the successful maintenance of employment (e.g., how to respond appropriately to criticism, how to get along with co-workers, the importance of showing up on time, etc.). In addition, should the ex-offender start to have difficulty with any number of things – tardiness, a bad attitude, or the like -- the employer could inform the job coach in order to turn potential difficulties into learning experiences prior to merely firing the ex-offender. According to the focus groups, job-coaching does exist to varying degrees, but not nearly to the scale necessary to adequately serve the size of the ex-offender population that could benefit.

For the marginally-functional reentering offender (i.e., one who severely lacks the skills necessary to successfully operate within a work environment), a "total employment opportunity" was suggested. This "total employment opportunity" would function much like a regular business and would hire only ex-offenders, with the goal being to intensively teach the aforementioned positive job skills. This idea in essence represents the need for an entire program that would revolve solely around teaching appropriate employment skills. This would obviously require an investment of resources, yet "social enterprise," or revenue generating programs, can often pay for the total costs of the program while other programs are reliant upon grants. While the creation of a new program is a huge undertaking, this idea is a reflection of the extent to which (a) much of the offender population is



severely lacking in job skills, and (b) what it might take to instill those skills. Usually these transitional job programs are combined with intensive case management to address goals and reinforce the soft skills learned on the job site.

The groups revealed the value of transitional jobs beyond the skill teaching of the participant. Transitional jobs programs usually generate revenue, which can pay the offender participant a small wage or stipend, and keeps the participant engaged. The small wage does not attract participants who could find a better paying job on their own. Several groups suggested that certain city services or work that could “give back” to the community has great appeal as it addresses blight and improves the neighborhoods where offenders may reside. Participants begin to see themselves as contributors in their community, thus adding value to the program. There are examples of programs like this throughout the nation. Others indicated that the ideal transitional job would teach the offender not only the “soft skills” associated with the workplace but also vocational skills that would eventually lead to a career. For example, there is a small pilot program in Kansas City model that teaches homebuilding and soft skills simultaneously while addressing the issue of blight and abandoned housing.

Similarly, many indicated that programming that could help offenders become entrepreneurs would add value to the community. Some programs teach offenders who have an entrepreneurial skill set all aspects of starting and operating a legitimate business. *Microenterprises* are small businesses that operate with very few employees and begin with a small amount of capital. The former offender often has more earning capacity as a business owner than an employee and often offenders have characteristics that make them good entrepreneurs (such as a willingness to take calculated risks and the need for autonomy). Moreover, former offenders who run businesses are more likely to hire other former offenders, expanding job opportunities in the community.

### ***Employment Policy and Systemic Gaps***

Work Opportunity Tax Credits, as mentioned above, offer federal tax incentive to employers who employ offenders within six months release from prison, in the amount of \$2,400 per hire. Interestingly, one offender could lose a job and be rehired and both businesses could be eligible for the \$2,400 credit as it is tied to the hire not allocated as once per offender. These tax credits could address job retention issues if they were made available annually for three years per hire. Groups also suggested that state and municipal tax credits for employers would encourage businesses to consider hiring offenders. Some professionals report teaching offenders to market themselves or lobby for positions based on tax credits and others use them to educate the employer about offenders in general.

Each state distributes tax credits as well as federal bonding, loss protection bonds in the amount of \$5,000, available in Kansas and Missouri. Employers may qualify for one to three bonds per hire depending upon the state (Kansas offers up to two) and the nature of the business.

Some discussions centered around licensing restrictions for employment. There are certain professions that restrict licenses for people with felonies across the board, some are limited restrictions based upon the crime, and others add time frames to the restrictions. Licensing restrictions for educators, health care workers, barbers, and many other occupations may have these restrictions. In Kansas City, Missouri, at the time of this writing, the City Council passed an ordinance allowing some people with felonies to apply for liquor licenses, for example, after four or eight years of post conviction or release good behavior. Others will continue to have a lifetime ban, for serious violent crimes. This was an issue that came up in focus groups as offenders have been unable to get a restaurant job in Kansas City.

### ***Transportation Program and Service Gaps***

Nearly every focus group presented discussion about the offender population's need for viable transportation. Transportation is of course directly related to the securing (and maintenance) of employment, but also impacts just about every other area of an offender's daily functioning. According to the results of the focus groups, a majority of the reentering offender population relies on friends and/or family for rides to and from various responsibilities (appointments with parole officers, treatment engagements, employment) as well as for ordinary daily needs (e.g., grocery shopping). Very few offenders leave prison with a valid drivers' license, and even fewer have access to an automobile. And that of course is to say nothing of the need for valid drivers' insurance and the expense that often accompanies the owning and use of an automobile. Agencies pay for one ride bus passes for offenders, gasoline vouchers, monthly bus passes, and some even provide for vehicles. Agencies were once able to buy unlimited reduced cost bus passes from Kansas City Area Transit Authority, but the amount they can purchase at a discount has been capped for the past five years. The public and private organizations agree that their funding is limited for these expenses and they often are unable to assist with the cost of a bus pass that could get an offender to an interview, an appointment, or report to a parole officer.

Aside from the use of a personal motor vehicle there is also a gap regarding the use of public transportation. The vast majority of the offender population either relies on friends/family for transportation in personal vehicles (as noted above), or, rely solely on public transportation. It became apparent via the discussions that ensued that while Kansas City Metropolitan bus system is far from perfect (leaving access to many areas an offender needs to go nearly impossible), public transportation in Kansas City, Missouri is much better than that which exists in Johnson County, Kansas or areas North of the River for example. Regardless, there is a great need for making what public transportation does exist more easily accessible to the offender population. Further, there is a great need for enhancing

existing public transportation in order to make a larger area of the metropolitan area more accessible. Also discussed was the need to integrate the current bus systems in a way that would make traveling across the state line between Kansas and Missouri easier. It was often reported that while reentering offenders live on the “Missouri” side, more employment opportunities existed on the “Kansas” side. For an individual who relies solely on public transportation (which is the norm within the reentering offender population), the opportunity for employment is nearly entirely blocked.

Small transportation programs and options do exist around Kansas City and there is need for these services to be indexed and included in collective resource information. Suggestions of transportation programs were initiated in some groups, such as a church using their van and volunteers to make regular trips to treatment centers or other appointments.

### ***Transportation Policy and Systemic Gaps***

One group noted the lack of corrections funds available to pay for bus tickets to return from some prisons to community. It appears the non-profit community is trying to compensate for this system gap, with some purchasing bus tickets and others picking up the offenders.

The lack of public transit options from areas where offenders commonly secure housing to places with viable employment is an issue that was referenced above. Funding needs to increase for public transit if this community is to see any significant change in accessibility to employment for the offender population.

It was very clear from the results of the focus groups that there is a need for enhanced efforts assisting offenders obtain valid drivers’ licenses. Doing so first and foremost eliminates the likelihood that they will be caught driving without a valid drivers’ license (which would constitute another crime). It was reported that if offenders’ had a valid driver’s license when they entered prison, it is often expired

or discarded by the time they leave. Furthermore offenders reentering the community often have unpaid fines related to driving that need to be taken care of before a new drivers' license can be issued. In addition, there is a prevalent need for the education (or re-education) of offenders regarding current driving regulations and the like.

In sum, there is a need to address the gap between an offender leaving the institution, and their access to valid driving credentials. Efforts need to be made in order assist offenders in the navigation of their respective Bureau of Motor Vehicles, as well as clear up unpaid traffic violations (for example), so they can receive a valid driver's license. Doing so would undoubtedly (a) avoid the potential for a new crime via driving illegally, and (b) exponentially increase opportunity regarding employment as well as several other critical areas (e.g., access to treatment, places to live, etc.).

### ***Housing Program and Service Gaps***

The issue of "Housing" appears to round out the trinity of needs regarding offender reentry (employment, transportation, and housing). According to the focus group results, much like transportation, reentering offenders rely heavily on family (most commonly) and friends (secondarily) for housing, often moving back in with a parent (most commonly the mother) or former partner (e.g., a former girlfriend/boyfriend). While 'crashing' at a family member's house or a friend's house is far better than homelessness (which incidentally is another very serious circumstance many reentering offenders are subjected to), it is far from ideal. An offender without a permanent residence (i.e., an apartment or house on which they are listed as the renter or owner) is exposed to an enhanced amount of risk for recidivism, as well as at risk for homelessness. For example, many reentering offenders are "one argument away" from being kicked out of their current temporary housing situation, which in turn (in many cases) puts them in violation of their parole supervision if they are indeed under supervision at

the time. Maintaining a permanent residence is often a condition of parole release, and failure to obtain and maintain such residence can be construed as a violation which can in turn lead to revocation and re-incarceration.

The focus groups with correctional professionals revealed several gaps related to a reentering offender successfully obtaining and maintaining permanent residence. The focus group discussions revealed a substantial shortage of available (suitable) housing for offenders (and this finding was verified by several of the offenders that were interviewed as well). Many professionals reported landlords that were unwilling to 'take a chance' on a known felon and actively eliminated the offender population from the pool of potential renters. Further, a related issue involved the fact that landlords that were willing to rent to reentering offenders often possessed properties that were not convenient regarding employment opportunities, as well as the places that the offenders are often required to report (e.g., probation and parole offices, and/or treatment and other requirements), not to mention the related issues of transportation and affordability. On all counts there appeared to be a gap in the amount of eligible (i.e. workable) living space, and the need for such space within the offender population.

Much like the employment dynamics cited above, there appears to be the need for education amongst landlords in the Kansas City Metropolitan area. Efforts need to be made in order to inform potential landlords about the reality that is faced by the offender population, and the fact that offering to provide housing (in exchange for rent) in fact may make the property, and the neighborhood, safer in the long term. Similarly, the focus group participants reported many misconceptions regarding what much of the offender population was really like behaviorally, and (like employment above) there are often resources (such as probation and parole officers) that could be utilized to mitigate and control for risk.

Many professionals (again, much like employment opportunities) cited the need to compile a list of viable living situations for ex-offenders. Specifically, there appeared to be a need for an index containing information regarding landlords that were willing to rent to ex-offenders, the location of these properties, and the price for the rent in order to assist offenders in finding and maintaining permanent residence that will work with their constraints. In addition, there was the need to reach out to, educate, and support landlords that were willing to rent to ex-offenders.

Further, in light of the fact that many offenders leave the institution with (literally) nowhere to go, there is a great need for many more transitional housing beds (e.g., halfway house beds) that would allow an offender to make a smooth transition back into the community while securing permanent housing. Transitional housing programs do indeed exist in the Kansas City metropolitan area, however, according to the results of the focus groups, many more resources that offer transitional living are needed. Such services would need to be geared toward more than just providing a safe livable environment, but would also need to educate offenders regarding the responsibilities associated with being a good tenant (much like the transitional job services mentioned above). The groups also report a severe shortage of emergency shelter in all counties except Jackson and a lack of complementary case management services to assist the felon specific population with housing.

### ***Policy issues regarding Housing***

An issue that repeatedly came up was the inaccessibility of public housing, Section 8 Housing and other Housing and Urban Development funded programs to the offender population. The Code of Federal Regulations makes it impossible for people who are considered sex offenders and those who have manufactured methamphetamines in HUD properties or public housing in the past. However, all other decisions denying housing to people with criminal convictions happen at a local level. Because

local housing authorities make the decision, people can appeal the decision at the local level. Largely there appeared to be much misinformation in the community about who was and was not allowed in public housing.

Another issue related to housing was that an offender often can not be paroled to a family member in public housing. Again, these decisions are made at local levels and can be appealed if the housing is a desirable option. Appeals are reportedly most effective when a professional participates in the hearing and advocates for the prospective tenant.

More germane to specific policies related to housing – several focus groups offered the need to create programs and initiatives that provided tax credits for landlords who were willing to rent to reentering offenders. Much like the tax incentives for potential employers cited above, offering rental tax credits would offer an incentive to landlords who otherwise might be unwilling to rent to ex-offenders (as well as motivate those landlords who currently rent to ex-offenders, to continue doing so). On a related note, there appeared to be the need to make it easier for landlords to receive rent directly from offenders who are eligible for public support when paying for housing. This would further enhance motivation to rent to ex-offenders by insuring the landlord would receive rent directly, and reliably.

All of the issues relate to housing above apply to the general offender population. However housing needs are of a slightly different nature regarding the sex offender population. The vast majority of states – Missouri is no exception – place restrictions on exactly where an individual who has been convicted of a sex offense can live. Kansas, by contrast, has a statute prohibiting any municipality from creating an ordinance restricting the residency of offenders. These restrictions typically state that sex offenders are not allowed to live within a certain radius of specific locations such as schools, public parks, and/or child care facilities. While the reasoning for these restrictions are for the sake of public



safety (particularly the protection of children), these policies greatly reduce the availability of viable housing for sex offenders. The availability of housing is so restricted in some cases (particularly in small urban and/or rural areas), many states (including Kansas) have reconsidered and revised such policies simply out of necessity. In short, it has been demonstrated that in some areas the restrictions on where sex offenders are allowed to live literally leaves no livable space available. Several focus group discussions revealed the need for new strategies regarding sex offenders – advocating for the relaxing of such restrictions while simultaneously increasing surveillance.

### ***Educational and Training Program/ Service Gaps***

It is common knowledge that educational attainment is directly related to employment and discussions of education arose in every focus group. Time in prison can be time to complete neglected education, basic literacy to secondary education is available in some systems. The removal of Pell Grants as benefits available to the incarcerated in the mid 1990's, has had lasting impact. Yet, some prisons around the nation are finding success with local colleges and universities, creating campuses inside institutions. Kansas Department of Corrections, for example, has partnered with Donnelly College and Kansas City, Kansas Community College to create some programming inside Lansing. Yet, there remains a gap for higher education that could be filled best with both public policy change and increased cooperative programming with higher learning institutions and departments of corrections.

More significantly, GED and Adult Basic Education are largely underfunded in some of the systems we examined. Reports regarding institutional cutbacks just in the past two years revealed scaling back contracted educational services in both Kansas and Missouri systems. Missouri reported offenders had to be transported to other facilities to be in compliance with statutes that require offenders to work on their GED when they had to discontinue a program in St. Joe. A Lansing GED

program was saved by a dedicated volunteer. Programs in every institution that accommodate all who have not earned a GED are recommended and can be, as in Lansing, managed by volunteers from the community. Groups specified these GED classes ideally would separate people based on grade level and include literacy, Adult Basic Education (for those not GED ready), and English as a Second Language.

Upon release, some groups reported that it is very difficult to access GED classes and, again, that some offenders returning from prison are unable to meet the requirements for GED and need ABE classes first. The GED budget was reportedly cut in the KCMO School District. Some of the area non-for-profits are creating programs for literacy, ABE and GED, yet they report limited capacity when compared to the overall need.

### ***Education and Training Policy Gaps***

Several groups suggested funding of secondary educational programs must be a priority of both the Department of Corrections and the Department of Education for prisons and community. Restoration of Pell Grants for prisoners would be another helpful benefit. A theme throughout the focus groups was that focusing on education, including early childhood education, could prevent future incarceration.

There is a service and policy related gap that came up in multiple groups. Offenders find it difficult to navigate through the services available through the workforce investment act at the Full Employment Council. Further, some services available through these dollars are not accessible to some male offenders because they did not register for selective service. While waivers can be made if the man demonstrates he was incarcerated or otherwise unable to register, the possibility of a waiver does not guarantee accessibility. Some Department of Labor funded programs are also restricted to non-violent offenders and are inaccessible for certain populations.

### ***Other Policy Gaps***

Aside from the major areas above that provide gaps to offender success in the community, several other policy issues became prevalent in focus group discussions, that play a role in offender success (or failure).

**Food stamps:** Enhancements in the enforcement of drug laws (i.e., the War on Drugs) led to a very large increase in the number of people convicted of a drug offense. The punishment schedules related to drug offenses increased, leading to an increase in the likelihood of incarceration for a drug offense (possessing, using, and/or trafficking in controlled substances) as well as increases in the length of time a person can be incarcerated for such an offense. In 1996, the Clinton Administration made it permissible for states to “opt out” of providing any form of welfare, Food Stamps or cash payments, to people with drug related felonies. Both Missouri and Kansas did “opt out,” yet Kansas reversed this decision three years ago. Missouri remains one of twelve states still denying Food Stamps to people with convictions post 1996. Restricting access to food and other basic resources greatly increases the likelihood that an individual will resort to illegal activity to support themselves, increasing the likelihood of return to prison. In addition, for offenders who have dependents under the age of 18, these policies restricting access to food and basic necessities possess reverberating effects further disadvantaging the children of ex-offenders. Research has indicated that children of prison inmates are seven times more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system (and in turn are much more likely to become incarcerated themselves compared to children of non-inmates) (Service Network for Children of Inmates, 2008). Policies restricting access to food stamps for drug offenders may play a role in continuing the familial cycle of incarceration.

**Medical Care:** It is agreed that the systems of correction in the Kansas City area are responding better to medical care, particularly for those with mental health conditions. Treatment, both for physical and mental health services, is one of the most costly parts of any corrections system. The focus groups revealed concern over the offenders with severe mental health diagnosis and those with HIV/AIDS who may leave the facilities without the medication they need to sustain them until they can access care and medication in the community. Again, this practice has greatly improved over the past few years, and most often offenders are leaving with a two week to thirty day supply of medications.

Dental care was also specified as a critical need that is not widely available in the community. While there are free and sliding scale services, the capacity is limited. Former drug offenders often have specific dental issues that can interfere with their esteem and their appearance can impact their ability to secure employment.

Finally, eyeglasses were included as an item needed frequently by the population of returning offenders. There is some limited service to pay for eyeglasses and exams but groups would like to see this more widely available.

**Staff Salaries:** In this time of budgetary concerns, area Department of Corrections are challenged to make extreme cutbacks in programming and other expenses. However, it was repeatedly suggested that the salaries of social service and corrections staff seemed to reflect the lack of value the public places on this work. Most concerns were shared in regard to the salary of Missouri Probation and Parole Officers and the Missouri Dept. of Corrections in general. The pay of this particular group is sub-par when compared to other Kansas, other counties, and federal employees.

**Identification and Legal Documents:** While great strides have been made in Missouri, Kansas and federal prisons to obtain identification prior to release, many professionals indicated offenders are

still not leaving facilities with basic legal documents such as birth certificates, Social Security Cards and state identification cards. Services and employment cannot be accessed without these documents. Often non-for-profits spend their limited resources purchasing and acquiring these documents. More importantly, the offender comes out not ready to begin employment or enroll in other services that would allow for successful reentry.

**Kansas Driver's Licenses:** It was recommended in several focus group discussions that the policies requiring "Registered offender" be placed on a Kansas offender's driver's license be reconsidered. Ex-inmates already experience stigmatization in several ways that block success without such policies. Further, it has been reported that the statute does not require these words but, rather, some numeric code. Kansas officials report that this will be removed from the Kansas ID's in October 2010.

**Spending of limited resources:** In trying economic times, most if not all public agencies experience budget cuts. However, in light of limited resources, many focus groups discussed the need to re-examine specifically how "criminal justice" monies are being spent in general. Specifically, the trend to spend more money on the 'front end' of the criminal justice system (e.g., law enforcement strategies), vs. the 'back end' (e.g., probation, parole, treatment, and services related to housing, transportation, and employment) was called into question. The focus groups revealed and discussed many of the reasons that the public approves more readily for spending on law enforcement. Reasons include the visibility of policing agencies in the community, as well as the fact that policing agencies serve a variety of functions in the community (not merely law enforcement). Further, the public clearly links "public safety" with the presence of police officers and enhancements such as technology and tools that police officers need to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively.

At the same time, offender reentry has clearly been shown to be a “public safety” issue as well – and a public safety issue that extends far beyond the realm of police work and law enforcement. Known felons in the community are often the most likely to re-offend. As such, any and all strategies geared toward mitigating the criminogenic needs of the offender population – through the provision of services that support the offender – would be money well spent according to the result of focus group discussion. As such, several members of the focus groups called for a ‘re-thinking’ of policies regarding how money is spent within the criminal justice system. Just one example cited by one focus group members included speculation about the cost of building one 1,000 bed prison, vs. the cost of any number of programs that could be established to serve far more than 1,000 offenders in a years’ time. As an aside – the \$29,000 per year cost for incarcerating an offender does not include the initial overhead cost of building the prison facilities in the first place.

**The need to ‘link’ the institution with the community:** Several focus group participants noted the need to start thinking about “reentry” quite literally, at the sentencing phase (i.e., before the offender even enters the institution to begin their sentence). This means planning for the day the offender will be released, on the day they are sentenced. This forward-thinking would enhance the likelihood that appropriate plans will be made that will increase the likelihood for offender success once they are released. For example, many professionals and offenders reported that there is a literal gap in time between the point at which an offender leaves the institution, and the point at which they make initial contact with a parole officer and/or service agency. In some cases this gap in time can last two or more weeks, and exposes the offender to risk of reoffending.

Ideally, there would be a seamless transition between the institution and the community, where by an offender would have contact with one or more individuals from the community before they leave the institution. Several focus group discussions pointed to the need to actually bring into the

institutions more resources from the community. Specifically there appeared to be the need to bring to the prison representatives from any and all agencies that serve the offender populations in order to create “no excuses” environment, and allow for the establishing of relationships between the agency and clients. It was reported that this need is perhaps most pronounced when offenders have mental health issues (particularly those mental health issues that are in need of medications – several focus group participants indicated that despite many offenders being successfully medicated while institutionalized, often access to medication is interrupted when they leave). Active mental health issues are a well-documented risk factor (increasing likelihood for re-offending) for a substantial portion of the offender population.

Prisons by definition are ‘closed institutions’ and function extremely effectively in that regard. In other words prisons keep those who belong in, in, and keep out those who do not belong. One focus group in particular noted that the need for the maintenance of prison security is paramount, however, if security could be maintained while taking clear steps toward linking community resources with the people in prison who need those resources, the likelihood of success would increase.

**Liaisons Between Law Enforcement and Corrections** More than one focus group identified the need for law enforcement to interface with corrections systems. Better communication or a liaison between systems would increase communication about concerns. More training to law enforcement about reentry and to corrections and service providers about the role of law enforcement could enhance the work between these systems.

**Kansas City Correctional Release Center:** One focus group in particular noted that though the Kansas City Correctional Release Center is officially recognized as a parole facility or halfway house, offenders are not allowed to access social security benefits while they are in residence at the facility.

While the KCCRC is a secure facility, based on its primary purpose (facilitating offender reentry), it appears to be only recognized as a prison by the Social Security Administration. Offenders who are eligible for social security benefits of some kind would benefit if they could access those benefits while making the transition from prison to the community. In fact, some get caught in a “catch 22” because they have been unable to get financial benefits that would allow them obtain housing and leave the facility.

**Ban the Box or Civil Rights Protection:** Several groups suggested that employers automatically discard applications of offenders due to their criminal record. Some states and municipalities have adopted “ban the box” policies which prohibit employers from asking about criminal history and/ or arrests on the job application. Other municipalities and states have made it illegal to discriminate against offenders unless the crime committed has a direct relationship to the former offender’s ability to perform the prescribed job duties. While Kansas has this type of statute, it appears that it is not exercised as many employers reportedly still make blanket statements such as, “we don’t hire felons.” Employers are still allowed to hire who they wish to hire yet they are encouraged by such policies to give equal consideration to people with criminal histories unless it interferes with their capacity to do the job.

**Non-payment of Child Support:** There were two pertinent issues pointed out by several focus group participants related to non-payment of child support. First, the wisdom of incarcerating someone for non-payment of child support was called into question. Several discussants indicated that it would be more beneficial to all involved if, rather than incarcerating a ‘dead beat dad’ for example, initiatives were put in place that put the individual to work thereby increasing the likelihood that they would be in a position to pay their child support (and other financial obligations). As noted above, incarceration



itself places a financial burden on the state, and as such, incarcerating (and spending money on) someone who owes money appears antithetical.

On a related note, the same focus groups that discussed non-payment of child support also noted the fact that policies related to the child support 'clock' should be reconsidered for someone who is incarcerated. Specifically, when someone is incarcerated they are no longer in a position to pay their child support, and as such the wisdom of allowing the obligation of child support payment to accrue while incarcerated was called into question.

**Expunging Criminal Records:** While some states, including Kansas, have laws allowing for certain criminal records to be expunged after a period of time, Missouri no longer allows for this practice. The very existence of expungement encourages good behavior since one's record can be wiped clean and the former offender no longer faces the barriers described throughout this study, especially related to employment.

### ***Program services gaps and issues***

The correctional treatment literature as a whole has well-documented the hallmark characteristics of correctional (rehabilitative) treatment programming. When an offender is in the community, whether via a sentence directly to probation, or a placement on parole supervision after a stay in prison there are two components necessary in order to insure successful transition and reductions in recidivism. The two components can be classified as "security", or supervision/control, and "treatment", or rehabilitation. The "security" function of community supervision represents accountability and safety. Probation and parole officers (as well as other professional actors such as case managers) are charged with knowing the whereabouts of an offender, keeping track of their activities and progress, as well as acting as a liaison between the offender and the court as well as other

agencies in the community. The “treatment” component involves the offender participating in treatment programs that are designed to address any number of criminogenic needs. The offender population possesses many of what have come to be termed criminogenic – or crime producing – needs. These criminogenic needs are the factors or characteristics that need to be altered in order to make a crime-free lifestyle possible. In addition, these criminogenic needs are those domains or factors that have been identified in the research as being predictive of criminal behavior.

Just a partial list of important criminogenic needs includes the following: (1) prior criminal behavior (of all types); (2) Sub-standard educational achievement (as well as a current need for additional aptitude in basic knowledge and skills); (3) Sub-standard skills related to employment; (4) Use of leisure/recreation time (i.e., no suitable pro-social leisure activities or options); (5) Sub-standard housing and/or accommodations (including criminogenic neighborhoods that promote criminal activity); (6) An anti-social peer network (i.e., friends and acquaintances that promote criminal activity); (7) An anti-social/non-supportive family environment (including criminal spouse/partner and other criminal family members); (8) Active substance use/abuse (including of course addiction); (9) Some mental health conditions including active illnesses that are in need of intervention; (10) A propensity to “think criminally” – that is, a mind-set that is conducive to antisocial/pro-criminal behavior (this would include thoughts, attitudes, values, and belief systems that are supportive of criminal activity). There is evidence that all of these aforementioned factors/domains have been shown to be predictive of criminal and other antisocial behaviors.

Programs that are effective in reducing recidivism target one or more of the above-listed criminogenic factors, and do so in a way that insures the program’s effectiveness. Unfortunately, most correctional systems have programs that purport to address criminogenic needs, and in reality are targeting other factors that are unrelated to recidivism (e.g., Art therapy, meditative techniques,

bibliotherapy and the like), or, even if the program does target the right things the program is doing so in a way that is not intensive enough, or utilizes a curriculum (for example) that is inappropriate for the population that they are serving.

The focus group discussions revealed several items that are worthy of exploring further in order to increase the likelihood that the programs are indeed effective in reducing recidivism. What follows are a series of items related specifically to programming (i.e. treatment) that should be considered and addressed when making treatment recommendations.

**Targeting Services Based on Risk Level:** Often programs are able to build into their offender selection process exclusionary criteria. It is understandable that no program is able to serve every type of offender, and as such the use of exclusionary criteria is very important in order to insure that the program will have the widest impact on the population that it does serve. For example, it is not uncommon for a residential treatment program to exclude offenders that have a history of violent behavior, in order to increase the perceived and actual safety of the clients that are in residence. Clearly the impact of the therapeutic environment would be compromised if there was an undesirable threat within the confines of the program (which also might affect staff/client interactions as well).

However, it is one thing to exclude a very specific type of offender (i.e., violent history or someone with a sex offense in their past) in order to insure a specific objective (such as safety), but it is quite another to intentionally select offenders who would more than likely succeed even without the services that the program offers. Programmatically it can be tempting to insure only offenders who will succeed enter the program, since that almost guarantees the program will be perceived as effective in meeting its objectives. However this also has the effect of wasting resources on offenders who do not

need the services that much, and worse, deprives other offenders who might present more of a challenge but who do indeed need the services offered and would benefit from them.

As mentioned above the most effective rehabilitative programs share a set of common characteristics. One of those characteristics is whether or not the program utilizes an actuarial assessment process in order to better determine who is most appropriate for the services that the program is designed to serve. An actuarial (meaning research-based) assessment process that gives a valid indicator of the criminogenic needs that the offender possesses is necessary in order to deliver services in a manner (duration and intensity) that is best suited for the offender. Further, programs that utilize actuarial risk/need assessments (as well as other assessment processes) are in a better position to build comprehensive case plans that will track offender progress as they move through the program. In other words, dynamic assessment allows programs to measure change in the immediate, and determine how well (or not) the program may be working with the offender. Programs that do not utilize standardized dynamic actuarial assessments are at a distinct disadvantage when selecting and classifying clients, and measuring progress. When there are not any assessment processes in place, staff run the risk of resorting to clinical assessment that has been shown to lead to admitting clients that are not suited for (i.e., do not need) the treatment program.

With recidivism being a growing problem, it is apparent there is a need for targeting more resources for those most likely to commit recidivism. Assessment instruments that look at factors such as age, prior record, and substance abuse history, are predicting who will return to prison with good accuracy. Programs need to be developed and further target those most likely to return to prison, and made available from the point of "entry" or commitment to facility and continue through return to community until those risk factors are reduced. While not every offender will choose to engage in services and make needed changes, interventions looking at those most likely to re-offend and using

practices that address criminogenic needs need to be expanded in the metropolitan area. Kansas Reentry is a good example of targeted programming to the high risk offender population.

**Measuring success considering recidivism:** Related to the section above, comparing one program's stated outcomes to another can be an ineffective way of determining overall success at reducing recidivism. There is not a standardized definition of recidivism; it can be defined as a return to incarceration (including for technical violations), commitment of a new crime, a new arrest, or a new criminal conviction. For the purpose of this research, it has been defined as return to incarceration. When programs' outcomes are being compared, it is important to have a standard definition of recidivism. Recidivism or return to incarceration can take a significant amount of time and rates over a three or more year period should be reviewed. It is also important to consider the base line recidivism rate for the population who enrolled in the program to determine the program's effectiveness.

**Need for transitional jobs:** As noted above (and related to the two issues immediately above), there is currently a great need for programs that offer transitional jobs – jobs that meet two objectives: (1) teach the offender job skills and employment responsibility in an environment that offers coaching and support, and (2) offer the offender at least some steady reasonable income. Several focus groups noted the possibility of tying the use of transitional jobs into the community service obligation that so many offenders have as part of their sentence to community supervision. For example, it would make sense that if an offender is obligated to perform community service that they do so in a way that meets that community service requirement, while at the same time offering them the possibility to learn what it means to be a productive responsible and respectful employee. Many offenders need very concrete and straightforward feedback and input regarding their workplace demeanor, the importance of showing up on time and giving notice if a day of work needs to be missed, and responding pro-socially to the direction of supervisors and co-workers. Similarly (particularly in environments where many other

ex-offenders are employed), transitional jobs could stress the importance of steering clear of individuals who provide antisocial/pro-criminal opportunities. The New York-based Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) has had great success with job placement (including statistically significant reductions in recidivism) when offering transitional jobs to ex-offenders.

**Need for other treatment programs:** Within the focus group discussions there was the perception that additional treatment – of all types – is needed in order to serve the criminogenic needs that are prevalent within the offender population. While the addition of treatment programs is a worthy endeavor, some caution is in order since there are many more ineffective treatment models in place than there are effective treatment models. Nonetheless, nearly every focus group involving practitioners cited the need for additional substance use/abuse treatment programs (both residential and within the community). Consider that in Missouri (which is representative of many other states if not the U.S. as a whole) 76 percent of drug offenders re-offend within three years, with the vast majority of them doing so for a drug-related offense. This alone may be an indicator of the need for more substance abuse services in general.

Also mentioned was the need for programs that specifically address criminogenic thought processes (i.e., criminal thinking, cognitions, attitudes, orientations, and belief systems). This included the expansion of cognitive behavioral programs, addition of personal development or life skills classes, and anger management.

Several focus groups (including both professionals and offenders) brought up the fact that many offenders pay supervision fees but they do not know what the fees are being used for. The implication is that the fees are used to offset the cost of supervision, and fund treatment programs. However some participants argued that if supervision fees are being paid, and if the offender is in need of services, that

there is at least a modicum of obligation that the offender receive the necessary treatment programming. Of course, the fault for failure to access programming may indeed lie mostly if not entirely with the offender, via a lack of awareness as to how to access the programming they need. Regardless, it appears that steps need to be taken to let offenders know specifically how to access necessary programming and resources.

Several focus groups noted that in their view there appears to be a trend toward not funding substance abuse and recovery programs (in general). In addition, great concern was shared regarding the length of time that programs actually serve offenders. One focus group emphasized what they called the “28 day” problem. The “28 day” problem was used to illustrate the fact that even for programs that are still operating, the length of time an offender is allowed to stay in the program (for a variety of reasons) has become shorter and shorter. In fact, what used to be “28 days” is now actually 1 or 2 weeks in practice which is typically just enough time to detoxify someone (and/or get them through the most severe and dangerous withdrawal systems) but does nothing for the long-term behavior that’s typically associated with a developing drug (or alcohol) habit. Drug problems – particularly severe ones – develop over a period of time – often many years. In addition, drug taking behavior, like any behavior, is indeed a behavior that can be learned (and unlearned). As such, several focus groups noted that it does not make sense that we expect a problem that has taken years to develop would be resolvable in a matter of days. There are many effective substance abuse treatment programs, however, the most effective ones are fairly lengthy in duration by comparison to today’s practices (e.g., 3 to 9 months). In light of restricted resources, it is unlikely that new long-term residential treatment programs can be developed, however, according to several focus group discussions, the need for these programs is prevalent.

***One Stop Center and Clearinghouse of Information*** In response to many of the issues that were brought up related to offender reentry, several focus groups discussed the potential benefit of a ‘one-stop’ center for offenders who reenter the community after a stay in prison. Depending on the structure and implementation of the one-stop center, several of the issues listed above could be mitigated. For example, there could be a tremendous benefit to creating a ‘clearing house’ for all the information, services, and resources a reentering offender might need. Further there could be some benefit for probation and parole officers who are looking for referral information as well, for their caseload. Institutional staff could engage in release planning by reaching out to the center for information.

A one-stop reentry center could help close the gap – both in time and needed services – that many offenders experience when they leave the institution. In addition, a reentry center could potentially serve as a liaison to the community, informing the community of ways in which volunteers can help. Similarly a one-stop center could also educate the public about the realities offenders reentering the community face, correcting incorrect assumptions.

### ***Systemic changes***

**Culture of reentry:** It was clear from several focus groups with professionals that “reentry” is appropriately regarded as the important subject that it is. Both Kansas and Missouri are faced with increasing numbers of offenders returning to the community after a stay in prison. Offenders coming out of prison, despite having served their sentences and despite having perhaps engaged in one or more treatment programs remain in need of many services – most of which are needs for services that are geared toward the aforementioned criminogenic needs, and general functionality. Results from the focus group discussions revealed a need to continue emphasizing all things related to reentry, focusing



on all the needs presented above and beyond. All agencies that work with the offender population need to make efforts toward hiring staff that understand criminal behavior as well as all the issues that are faced by the reentering offender population. One focus group in particular noted the need for a cultural shift in correctional agencies in both Kansas and Missouri. Many times the notion of needing to think about and work toward reentry at the point of sentencing (i.e., before the offender even enters an institution) was a necessity.

In recent years many agencies that work with people have allowed “strengths-based” case management to define the mission and processes when working with clientele. Strengths-based case management, broadly, involves discovering and emphasizing the strengths (i.e., positive things, or protective factors) that are present in an individual’s life in order to help them become more successful. While a strictly strengths-based philosophy may be appropriate for certain populations, this approach may have some limitations regarding the offender population. The offender population, while possessing some strengths also possesses several important negative factors – disadvantages – that simply cannot be overcome by merely focusing on strengths. While it is important to find and utilize functional characteristics within the individual it is equally important that this focus does not cause a blind spot when it comes to the negative anti-social factors that are at work in an offender’s life. The problems that many offenders have are very influential and in most cases require moderate to intensive intervention if they are to change. And this intervention takes time, energy, and resources, that in many cases do not exist to the extent necessary to serve a large swath of the offender population. Those offenders that do not receive the intervention that they need, in the format that they are able to respond to, are those that will end up re-circulating through Kansas and Missouri’s prisons systems contributing to the very high return-to-prison rates.

### ***Educating the public***

Nearly every focus group with professionals discussed the need to educate the public about probation and parole services (in terms of how community correctional agencies function) as well as about the plight of the reentering offender. Several focus group participants felt as though there were vast misunderstandings about the offender population particularly the opportunities that may be blocked. For example a very small portion of the general public may be aware that the most basic of needs – such as housing, employment, and transportation – are very difficult to obtain for a large portion of the reentering offender population. Further, it was perceived that the public is unlikely to be aware of the fact that when these needs remain unmet in the offender population, public safety becomes threatened.

Several focus groups brainstormed about the need for public service announcements, or some mechanism to educate the public about what the offender population experiences when they leave the institution and return to the community. Disseminating information on a wide scale might in turn impact members of the public that have the ability to provide (should they choose) places to live, job opportunities, transportation options, or even treatment opportunities.

Educating the public could also increase the availability of volunteers from the community. Community correctional agencies have traditionally relied on volunteers for a number of functions – tasks that greatly benefit the offender population. Plus, increased representation of the public via volunteers could also increase the likelihood that other members of the public – those that (again) hold employment and/or housing opportunities for reentering offenders – will become aware of issues that they could help out with.

## **Recommendations and Conclusions**

Though many recommendations have been made through the course of this study, it is important to first look at those most likely to impact public safety and further investigate the feasibility of implementing them. The community has come together to work on reentry issues through groups like Gracious Promise's Community Roundtable, Missouri Reentry Process Teams and the Kansas City Metropolitan Reentry Coalition. At this moment, there is a group of federal, state and local corrections professionals working toward a regional planning conference. The recommendation is that this Gaps Analysis be used as the basis for a metro-wide reentry five year strategic plan, with the overarching goal of reducing metro-wide recidivism. The group planning such a conference would like to involve all area systems that impact the lives of offenders, including education, courts and law enforcement, to name a few. The current goal is a 2011 regional reentry strategic planning conference.

In order to reduce recidivism, public and private organizations must continue to work together to target those individuals most likely to perpetuate the cycle of crime-arrest-incarceration. That is not to say that there should not be programs targeting all offenders, but that the resources available should make every effort to serve people who will place the community and themselves at further risk without proper intervention. These interventions should pay particular attention to those no longer under correctional supervision as well, minimally to ensure this former offender is abreast of resources available to him or her.

The creation of a body of information that is available about all matters related to prisoner reentry is particularly prudent in metropolitan Kansas City. While paper resource directories have somewhat served this purpose, the ideal scenario is the creation and ongoing use of a database that would be available for organizations to make changes as soon as they arise. Throughout the focus

groups, service and program suggestions were made for services already in existence. Lack of comprehensive information to the offenders and those who monitor and or serve them should not be the reason why a person commits recidivism; the community can respond to this call for information through collaboration to ensure every offender who returns to our community knows about resources for transportation, food, shelter, clothing, employment, child care, and more. The additional impact would include the avoidance of duplication of services, the ability for family or staff related to any prisoner throughout the nation, with a home plan of metro Kansas City to access information to assist the reentering, and information for funding sources about area initiatives.

Finally, it is recommended that legislature and policy makers from local governments, Missouri, and Kansas, use this document to consider a “reentry platform,” much like the 2010 New Jersey Bill that address multiple reentry issues and allowed for not only tax payer savings but also increased public safety. In the meantime, more offenders will get their needs met with these policy revisions and will become productive tax paying citizens. Missouri and Kansas can surely replicate this in a way that makes sense to each state, to further the important legislative work that has already occurred in each state, related to reentry, incarceration and public safety. It is the hope that this report, capturing the information of our areas most knowledgeable reentry professionals and people with criminal histories, will further develop into a plan of action that responds to gaps and ensures increased public safety in Kansas City and added success for the former offender.